



# Experiences and Issues for Rural Energy and Water Customers in Priority Services Register (PSR) Code Groups

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# PSR register

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- A database which utility network operators are legally required to keep. It contains names and contact details of customers who have applied to be registered who may require additional support and are the highest priority to receive support during a disruption. Households listed on the PSR have someone who meets at least one of these basic criteria, defined by Ofgem (2021) as:
  - have reached your state pension age,
  - are disabled or have a long-term medical condition,
  - are recovering from an injury,
  - have a hearing or sight condition,
  - have a mental health condition,
  - are pregnant or have children under 5,
  - have extra communication needs (such as if you don't speak or read English well).
- Ofgem also states that there are other situations where you will likely be able to register, such as 'if you need short-term support after a stay in hospital' (Ofgem, 2021).

# Overview

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- 27 People interviewed and/or participated in focus groups
- *People with mental ill-health and/or dementia*
- *People who are dependent on medical equipment, e.g., stair lift, ventilator, dialysis pump, oxygen concentrator, apnea monitor*
- *People who are blind or partially sighted.*
- Our evidence found difficulties accessing specialist services, poor transport, issues around isolation, and issues around PSR services.
- Complex needs, particular circumstances and multiple vulnerabilities
- An achievement of independence, dignity & resilience

# Key findings

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- Households who rely on medical equipment revealed that loss of electricity was the utmost concern.
- Stoppages to heat sources (electricity or gas) can also be detrimental for people with medical devices, amongst other PSR code groups.
- Increased electricity, gas, and water use for households with people living with mental ill-health and/or dementia.
- The impacts of planned or unplanned utility outages.
- Enhanced vulnerabilities – digitisation of telephone services, remoteness, low number, high impact specific problems – boreholes.
- Expectations of a second class service

# Recommendations - suppliers

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- Seek opportunities to actively listen to people on the priority services register.
- Strive to make communications as accessible as possible.
- Provide further support when flushing water through the system.
- Run a targeted promotional campaign about the PSR, its existence and what it does.
- Ensure support provisions are in place for people with specific water needs.

# Recommendations – more widely

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- Increase collaboration between utilities and statutory and non-statutory organisations to enhance the support offered to customers on the PSR (data matching would require legislation).
- Work with the UK government and BT (Openreach) to ensure rural customers are supported during the completion of the digitalisation of the telephone network.
- Automatic enrolment for those most at risk of disruptions to their utilities, with an opt-out.
- Explore providing backup batteries to high-risk customers with medical devices in rural areas.

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